



## Drawing On Life

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NIGEL MURRAY

Nigel Murray *Cut 1*  
Interview *27s*

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I think I've always had an interest in art and drawing. Probably initially, drawing as a child was a nice form of escapism. Just being able to doodle away my thoughts. Probably more lean towards drawing than literature, so as opposed to a child writing a story, I'd probably be a child who'd sit and do drawings. And that was probably where it sort of began.



## Nigel Murray *Cut 2*

### Interview *58s*

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I think in work now I find it as a really valuable tool, a really valuable device. But like anything, I suppose, trying to understand and appreciate the appropriateness of what way you use it and when. Whether it's just sort of recording a thought or trying to work through an architectural thought - just to document that - and trying to understand a couple of the moves, it's just a really quick way of recording a drawing.

And the same form... I find it really useful for conversations with clients. Having a conversation about a thought. It's just a way of quickly trying to represent that, to make sure that the image that the client has in their head and the image that I have in my head aren't two completely different things. So I think it's just a really useful tool.





# Nigel Murray *Cut 3*

## Interview *50s*

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Equally in the office and in work and with clients, I find also that there's a different ability to have a conversation over a sketch in comparison to using a computer image. We found that if you put a computer image in front of a client, I think they feel that this is their building, this is their project, and we've got that. It's a done, fixed thing now, and it's a finished thing. Whereas, when we sketch something, there's a feeling of... it's a temporariness, or less preciousness to it, that allows them to be able to talk about it in a way that they feel we can have a conversation over it. It's just a snapshot of a moment of the conversation. And that we can work through that, and sit and deface it in a way that the image from a computer feels finished and beautiful. It's just an enjoyable and powerful way of communicating ideas, be it for myself to record, or with a client for a conversation.

And then outside work I just really enjoy life drawing. There's an ability, in the complete opposite way just to enjoy the drawing, to record, without having to think about it. Within work, it's trying to record and work through a thought process of an architectural idea, whereas for me with life drawing it's the most wonderful way just to disappear for about two hours just sitting and drawing an idea, just recording the figure. And it's almost without thought - which is really enjoyable.



# Nigel Murray *Cut 4*

## Interview *1m 26s*

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I think again, it's probably a more memorable experience by recording something through drawing. I think, with a snapshot, unless it's something which feels that you're really kind of taking a very precious thing - particularly in the age of digital photography, where there isn't the expensive development, so you just kind of record everything - and they just get trapped in a computer, so you don't have the physical object to refer to and to review. So you just have these images which you flick through. So in comparison, the physical nature of sitting and drawing a line or recording a line, I think there's a linkage direct to the brain where you record that moment in a building or a landscape or a person, whatever you're drawing, and you're thinking about proportion and space, or perhaps just a little quirk in a building, a quirk in a figure or whatever it is, that registers. So I think there's just a moment that you register and remember more so with drawing than with photography.



# Nigel Murray *Cut 5*

## Interview *1m 10s*

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The sketch probably develops in different ways and unfortunately it probably feels more like a work diary now than an architectural journal. But at university when I had the time and luxury - I didn't have money but I managed to make it available just to travel around and visit friends for cheap in different cities - and possibly my most enjoyable time with a sketchbook is on a train, and my most enjoyable journeys were on a train. And sitting doing a doodle of something which seems to just pop into the mind. So I think there's a way that it maybe records thought, more than these days - it's more factual, it records projects and different things. Unless I'm lucky enough to sit in a nice cafe in a nice part of town, and sit and records perhaps just a building, or record whether it's the proportion of an elevation or the cornicing of detail or document the experience of that.



# Nigel Murray *Cut 6*

## Interview *52s*

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There's just a connection with the pen and the page for me that's sort of directly plugged into the brain. It sort of evolves a way of working through a drawing. And perhaps that's where the sketchbook comes into its own. It feels like it's a blank canvas which isn't precious for me, where I just enjoy sketching. And that sort of enjoyment perhaps allows me to develop an idea in a more - I don't know if a 'comfortable' way is correct - but that space feels like a nice way of exploration for me, which probably is usually just kept to myself. Which is why I am probably a bit less precious about it, and enjoy it more. And probably do some really bad drawings. But occasionally some nice ones.



## Nigel Murray *Cut 7*

### Interview *1m 16s*

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As a product of travelling about, or when I was in university in different places, there's probably a box in the garage for the university ones. But my work ones, I've found a shelf in the house where they just have started to fill a space, which is good. But I think looking back on them, it allows an appreciation sometimes of what I had done before but didn't realise the merit in what it was. And to be able to reference those marks on a page and perhaps revisit them as well, having looked at them with fresh eyes, I can see sometimes a new thought in what I'd documented at that time. I do sometimes flick through them trying to refer to a project, and I remember something that I may have explored or recorded at that time so I don't look back at them that often, but I can pull a sketchbook out where I maybe worked on a project or maybe a trip to a city or whatever and made a few notes on it, so I do refer to them occasionally, yeah.



NIGEL PEAKE

# Nigel Peake *Cut 1*

## Interview *1m 48s*

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I have always drawn. It's my way of interpreting something and responding to something. It's these things that you think back on, but I did come up with three brothers and a sister, and none of them draw. So it's my way, I think, of responding to something and also, I find I can say more in drawing than I can with words. So that is why I draw. And it's endless. I can draw forever, I think, and never be bored of it. And sometimes, you know when you hear about people saying that a blank page is very troubling or very worrisome - I think it's just the best thing because you can do whatever you want with it.

Whereas sometimes if you have to write an essay or a text, there are set words you can use in a certain order, whereas drawing you can draw anything you want. The possibilities are endless, which I love. Because I think sometimes in life you don't have that: the possibilities are ended. And also what I really like, you don't know what the end result will be so you're drawing to work something out, so you're figuring it out as you go along. So it's a process involved in what you do, so... And also because a lot of my drawings would take quite a little bit of time to make, so you return to the work day after day, and then because every day you sit you are in a slightly different mood, that will then show itself in the drawing.





# Nigel Peake *Cut 2*

## Interview *1m 04s*

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It's the loveliest thing, I think, to be able to just sit and not do anything but just look. Because I think all of us spend so much time doing... I think some people might just sit to procrastinate or whatever, but I think to just sit and look out at, you know, a tree or a leaf - these things have just got so much detail that it's just pure joy of looking at it. You know, so whenever I draw, you have the memory of the thing that you saw, but it's not really the physicality of the thing; it's just the bit that you can't describe is then why I want to draw it. You always want to draw it as it is, but then you don't know what 'it' is. That's when the drawing works for me anyway, when you kind of want to explain something that you can't explain.





# Nigel Peake *Cut 3*

## Interview *1m 58s*

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I just find it amazing how many variations there are of one thing. You know, like a gate. So you have a gate but it slowly falls apart with the wind and the rain but then the farmers slowly fix it - so it loses what it was, but then it becomes something else. But because each farmer will fix it in his own way - with the blue twine or the orange twine or the bit of the branch or a bit of a broken pallet - and they bring themselves to that little moment. And you know it's this beautiful thing but then you know I've talked to farmers about it, and they kind of look at me - *we don't even know what you're talking about*. But it's just these beautiful thing, and every field will have this one moment. So you know the gate is one thing, and also then the sheds I also find incredible. But then also cities, and I love typography. So it's just this variation of a thing, which I find incredible. And I guess that's where we show our human nature: we have that little bit that we want to not have a letter 'a' like everybody else so you add a bit of a curl, or you drop a shadow, you know, all these things, we seem to be endlessly trying to tinker with it. So drawing is that way of recording it, for me. And of course I'm seeing it with my own baggage, so then I bring something to it, in itself. But then it's just even bookshelves I find amazing, because you have all these different records and books and all these different thicknesses and spines and logos and... I mean, it's just amazing... what we do.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 4*

## Interview *1m 29s*

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With cities what I find really incredible is the layering. You just have this constant layering of history - which is great to draw because you have... What I always love about cities is that they claim to be new every day by cleaning it. Whereas here it's old. If there's dirt on the road it'll stay until the rain washes it away. But for cities there's this notion that it's new and sort of bright. And then in the same way of the blue twine that the farmers use to fix things, I really do see things, like a skyscraper, in the same sense of wonder - you know, did we really build that? So we build it with slow movements of bricks and bricks and bricks. So I just love that: the same person who mended the gate could, in another sense, build a skyscraper. But cities are just fantastical places, but I can't spend that long in them, because I do get exhausted, because it's just too much to record, or too much to see or too much to hear... You know it's just kind of too much. But if I had the time, you know, one walk down the street could entertain me for a year of drawing, happily.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 5*

## Interview *1m 10s*

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You know it's quite nice to get lost in a city, and it's quite nice to get lost in the country. It's just that thing, when you have the opportunity to experience something that's off the track that you're meant to be going on. A lot of the things I'll draw are normally when I'm late to meet somebody, or when I'm lost. Be it a set of tiles under some door where I thought I was meant to meet somebody but then I wasn't. You just wonder sometimes if you show people the drawings that you make, they may not get where they come from. even though they've seen them, and then it comes back to that looking and seeing. And maybe it was also growing up in the country - where, say a plant grows a little bit more, you kind of go, oh that's incredible! But then if you go to a city and they've demolished a whole block and put something new up in the last 6 months, well that's also incredible.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 6*

## Interview *35s*

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I never take a map where I go, which is quite irritating for people when they want to meet you. And also when you're away you don't use your phone because you're roaming or whatever so it's too expensive. So it's that lovely thing, you kind of look up before you go - OK, so the street's over there - and then you get that wonderful thing you come out of a metro, and you go, oh that's not how it is in my memory! And then you begin to wander around, and it's just that beautiful thing. But you do end up then turning up late to meetings, but you have seen some very good doorway or something on the way so it's kind of worth it.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 7*

## Interview *19s*

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That's what I love about maps, is that if you draw a map, it seems factually correct automatically because there's a map - but it's quite fictional as well. And I mean, I do look at maps; maps are something that intrigue me because of, again, the layering of information, and the editing of information as well.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 8*

## Interview *1m 02s*

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It's not something I set out to do, but I just end up doing it in sketchbooks you know. Or I remember reading a George Perrec (sp?) essay about all the rooms he'd slept in - and I'd done that before I read the essay. It's just a natural thing that you do sometimes. Or you know you record the metro names that you pass. My memory isn't great, it's actually quite vague so that's also why I draw to try and remember something... Because the way I'll work is, maybe I'll draw something in a sketchbook and then twelve months later I'll use it or draw it for an exhibition or something, or for a project... But I like then that there's a twelve month period between an initial sketch or an initial drawing and when you go to do it, so all that time is going to be wrapped in as well to what you'd end up making.





# Nigel Peake *Cut 9*

## Interview *14s*

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There is that fine line between fact and fiction, which I quite like. It's quite nice. It is factual because I was there, but it's also fictional because it's not what's there.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 10*

## Interview *43s*

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I make these little books and they all have a story, but the story is often not told. Between the two images there'll be something that I'll be thinking - but that may not be written out. <Phone ringing>. I quite like that, I mean... It's this thing if you try to explain everything then the magic is just gone. And some people love to explain, whereas I've drawn the thing to explain it in the hope that that will say it for me. <Laughter at phone ringing>. Bet you it'll ring again in a few minutes. If I know the phone caller.





# Nigel Peake *Cut 11*

## Interview *45s*

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So I did this bridge series, so that was 34 drawings in sequence. But then for other ones I would spend maybe a month drawing, and then you have just a pile of drawings, and then enjoy the process of putting it together. So then I'm actually free to say, "Oh, well this could go with this." Because it's my work I can enjoy that... <phone ringing, laughter> - you see there's the other phone ringing now... you can enjoy the ability to do that. You don't feel the need to be constrained. But then I do quite like following sequences as well.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 12*

## Interview *1m 04s*

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<looking at skateboard> That's quite old. Because I do like words as well. That's the great thing about books is that you can put words with your drawings... It's sometimes quite nice not to paint or not to draw and just write. I mean <the skateboard> is a collection of things. But I think that about nearly everything I do. You know, when you put one word with another word - how does that affect those two things? The same way, if you draw a thick line and a thin line - what happens? Or when you put blue and yellow. You know these are the nice... these are the things I think about when I'm drawing. Which are very basic things, but quite enjoyable decisions.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 13*

## Interview *1m 08s*

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Because it's by hand, I think it's that is the thing. You know I really enjoy writing words. If I had time, I mean... It's that we all write so quickly now, if we even write at all. It seems to be worrying that people don't even hand write things. But you know it's just that lovely joyful thing that, by putting a horizontal with a loop, you make a letter, and then that letter means something and those letters come together to make a word. And then you use those to make sentences. It's just that beautiful thing of putting things together to do something. And I think that's again why in architecture, I love that tectonic thing, just that simple putting together to make something. It's just full of so much joy, in doing that. But you don't think about that when you're doing it, only now when you've asked me that, do I begin to think about it. But that's why certain times you'll like certain letters, like 'F', it's very nice. But then sometimes 'S' is troubling, but then you don't know why.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 14*

## Interview *59s*

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And it's very simple, that, but then sometimes when we grow up we think, 'Oh, don't enjoy *that* - don't enjoy writing the letter 'k', because that's a bit weird, or a bit odd'. But really it's beautiful. But this thing that maybe I've not grown up. Because stationery shops I still adore - as most people will - but it's just that I still hold on to those things that I liked as a kid. And I don't have a problem with it, but you find it weird or odd when other people don't spend their time drawing. Or listening to records *and* drawing. This is what I do. It's strange when my friends grow up, and I'll be like, 'Oh have you heard that?' and they'll be like, 'Oh no, we didn't have time'.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 15*

## Interview *45s*

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I really do think I get through life by not making decisions sometimes. It seems very natural, so why would I not continue to do it? Non-decision-making sometimes gets you to where you want to go. But it is that thing that I just draw all the time. But because I also work as an illustrator, I'll draw for other people quite a lot. Sometimes you just want to draw for yourself. But that's the way of it. But by drawing for other people I can get to draw my own books and print my own books, so...



# Nigel Peake *Cut 16*

## Interview *1m 35s*

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I remember finding it quite difficult initially. Or maybe it's stubbornness as well, that you want to draw in a certain way. But one of the major things I learnt through architecture - you know by the end of your sixth year, you realise that the best review that you can have is by not talking - by having all the work, and all the questions answered by your drawings. But you do have to give a little to learn that... But I do remember finding it initially quite difficult, and also because Edinburgh - and I'm really glad they didn't - they didn't teach you how to draw. So you had to learn through books or through your own research, so that meant that you built up your own language of drawing. You weren't told how to draw an axonometric, or you weren't told how to draw a plan.

So you had to make a lot of mistakes, initially. Which I have no problem with. I think mistakes are really healthy. Through these bad drawings initially, you began to realise why it didn't work and what you had to do and, you know, this thing of thickness and thin, how these things begin to actually help you. But you have to make the mistake initially. But I still make mistakes, continually. But they'll look the same to anyone else as my normal drawings but then, for me, there's something missing so then I'll readdress it - why it's flawed.





# Nigel Peake *Cut 17*

## Interview *1m 05s*

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Well it's very difficult to mistakes on computers - sorry, no, it's very easy to mistakes on computers - but [not] mistakes you'll learn from. Because then you'll just apple-z. You can go back and you're fine. Whereas when you draw by hand you've lost maybe three or four days because it didn't work. But computers are fantastic because they give you that ability to... You know it's great to have that combination of drawing and machine I think, because those two things do help. But all my thesis drawings were hand drawn. They were three or four table lengths so you start at one table and draw the whole way through - so it's that lovely process of learning while you draw. The thing about sitting with your laptop, I think it's just so difficult to design or to think, even, with a computer. I think a computer's a great finisher, but to begin you have to draw.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 18*

## Interview *1m 06s*

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Everything just seems so flat and closed and finished. Whereas I think the most beautiful thing is to make something that's open - that still allows you to be involved in it. But these computer renderings - there's no depth, there's nothing to it, and it's finished. You can't question it because it's there. And it's also now this thing that you look through magazines, and the renderings are as good as the buildings, so you're kind of wondering now. which is which? Or if you're tutoring and somebody says "Oh I modelled this" and you think Thank God, somebody's modelled something... And then it's actually a computer model. Here we go again. The way they can rotate it and you get initially fooled by this trick - but that's all it is, is a trick. Whereas if you actually make a physical thing, there's a tactile quality to it. And you obviously question, when you're making it, what card do you use? What wood do you use? What colour? What glue do you use? But all these things disappear in the beautiful world of inDesign or whatever you use to draw.





# Nigel Peake *Cut 19*

## Interview *1m 58s*

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I really never remember anybody telling me how to draw, from my junior times. I remember once somebody teaching me about the whole trick of bleeding one colour into another colour, to make a sunrise. And that was kind of fun. I think it's only through discovery of your own "thing", or your own voice, can you then begin to make something that's actually worth saying. In architecture school it's pretty difficult, because some students have parents who are architects, so they're obviously very well versed in "how it should be". But then I just remember their work - it seemed so perfect, without the mistakes, or the technique or the discovery of a technique.

I remember after a few years learning how to draw on wood through carving paper - and just that pure joy of doing that - whereas if somebody told you that on the first day, you'd just be like, 'Oh, OK, I can do that'. Or you know, drawing on wax or drawing on metal. You know when you're sitting there and you're not sure what to do, and then you make a move of your own accord, as opposed to somebody saying, 'Why don't you do this?' But then that takes quite a lot of initiative and also curiosity. Or imagination. These things sometimes are kind of frowned upon almost. But I think without those, those are your major tools. Because anybody technically could use form-Z, that's what they used to have at school. I just remember one lesson, and there was more beeping coming from the machine, you know, every move I made was wrong. So I kind of thought, no, this is really reductive. This is not helping me.



# Nigel Peake *Cut 20*

## Interview *2m 20s*

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I just love things or objects, and I love how they come together out of mistakes... You know when you put together an envelope and a red hat and a book and a bit of tissue paper - these things, they all have their little connectors, which I really like. Books and records are probably the things that I collect the most. And flea markets are dangerous for me. I just get attached to things. You know like spinning tops or old postcards or toolkits or trains, you know... I think it's just the playfulness of them, and there's just something about them. You'll see maybe a hundred things and you'll maybe have no response but then you'll see this one thing that just seems right. And I really like that. But generally it can be quite irritating because you have too much stuff so then you end up knocking over everything.

I'll always have a big-ish table but then I'll always draw in this tiny little space because everything else, I've surrounded it with inks or paints or something... But then I think you have to make a mess to make work. For me, I have to do that... <picking up various objects from his desk...> Because look at that <paint pot>, it's just a beautiful container, and then the colour, and then you remember where you bought it... And then these things last a year or a couple of years at least... And then you have stones... And I got this recently <magnifying glass> and this is quite a dangerous tool, because you can draw in better detail than before. But they're all probably quite childlike things as well. Sharpening pencils is still quite good fun. But then I read that John Steinbeck, when he didn't know what to do, he would sharpen all his pencils. So it's kind of good company maybe.



McCULLOUGH  
MULVIN

McCullough Mulvin *Cut 1*  
Interview *59s*

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VM: I suppose you might say there's a starting point, which is about the site and the process. And this particular project is a wave energy centre in Ringaskiddy in Cork. And so it has these enormous tanks. I mean, they're huge. 35m x 12m - they're enormous things. So they were the beginning of, "How on earth are we going to make something that's going to fit the budget, that's going to do what it has to do, get in and get out..." <Inaudible> ... Amazing site. Here's the site plan drawn actually.

NMcC: Cork Harbour's the only place in Ireland that's like Japan. You can actually do whatever you want. Nobody really minds. It's beautiful and industrial at the same time, and you can build huge things. And they're kind of OK with oil refineries. But <paper rustling> this is a more delicate thing in the middle of it.



## McCullough Mulvin *Cut 2* Interview *1m 30s*

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N: It's on the coast anyway. And there's brilliantly a crematorium near it out to sea on an island opposite it. And then beyond that a big naval base and then Cobh beyond that. It's an incredibly interesting watery context of towns and industrial buildings. <Audio: volume improves>. And the site is there right in the water. That's an existing kind of marine college and this is a reclaimed industrial site, partly land...

V: This is the beginning of the last bit of the land, if you like.

N: But the history of it is that it's an island and it's infilled. It's mainly industrial fill around where there was an island so you're building on part solid, part not.

V: That's right. And I suppose when we looked at it, it's such an enormous theatre - it is absolutely vast. And to think of putting a building into it, and they wanted a research building which had this huge testing facility as well for making quarter scale models for things like wind turbines and floating them and all that. And to have research and testing in the same place, they had an idea that they'd have a building and a shed. And we thought, no - that's really horrible. It would be much nicer to pull the whole thing together and make a building which has a face to the harbour and then part of that is this kind of train behind it.



McCullough Mulvin *Cut 3*  
Interview *44s*

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V: We started off with almost like a square block which just like an L-shaped thing which came up at the end.

N: Which is the research section...

R: So in terms of the brief there's this very interesting thing about scale which are these huge tanks and these tiny offices - and how to marry the two and also give the presence of the building... It's so important in terms of its context so it needed height as well.

N: And making something that's full of water next to water. What way do you do that? And obviously they like the idea of dry docks and formalising the edge of a piece of water next to a wild piece of water, that actually isn't so wild. It's all very interesting I think as well.



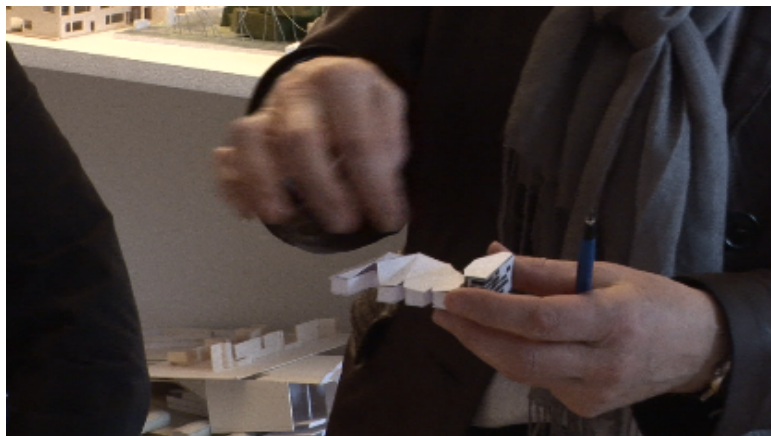
McCullough Mulvin    *Cut 4*  
Interview                *48s*

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V: And we started thinking about things like wave motion and so on, and then that became a factory roof that became very flat. And then we realised that we couldn't actually fit these tanks into that rectangle so we had to pull it out a bit and push it... This was the tiny thing that we started with - we post-rationalised that at the end and made a new folding roof for it, but in starting with something like that, seeing how we got light into this testing space, and then beginning to fold it so it was more like the wave motion they were interested in. And yet having this great megaphone to the sea which we really enjoyed.

N: So it becomes about the fold up and how do you actually connect these things.

R: Yeah, the connection between them.





McCullough Mulvin *Cut 5*  
Interview *1m*

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V: And all these are models that we do ourselves as part of the process. We do a sketch, we make a model. We do a sketch, we make a model. And the whole thing kind of informs itself.

N: It's evolved in the last couple of years, which has been great. All the time, there's someone who's actually drawing or someone who's making a model. It's completely informed the process.

V: But if you can imagine, the wind's just eroding from this side. We wanted to develop something that would begin to suggest that eating away. We started eating into the plan here, both to reduce area and to provide ventilation. Because these are workshops. This is part of the tank area itself. And this is the area they need to get in for deliveries and stuff. So there's a lot of forces pushing on this. And then on the other side you've got pedestrians coming in for the research block. And you've got visitors arriving from the front. So the whole thing is a very three-dimensional sense of something.





McCullough Mulvin    *Cut 6*  
Interview                *51s*

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V: And for us I suppose the thing of working from the site plan and going back to the... thinking of the land and impressions in the land, because (do we have any ones here which have the tanks in them?)... You can kind of see in there. The big squares on the floorplate there are the tanks, and the sense of those being eroded into the landscape.

N: But you have to imagine them almost without the building there. Almost that they're actually about themselves. And it's making a building of the sea that's not figurative. It's already frail by its erosion. Like a piece of driftwood or something like that.



McCullough Mulvin    *Cut 7*  
Interview                *1m 11s*

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V: They're often things as simple as that, where you've got a rock - and you just begin to get interested in the layers of something almost being eroded away. One of the things we used as a reference when we were presenting this to the client. There's a pool or a set of kind of sinkholes. And they're naturally carved into the rock. The sea comes in when the tide is in. And when the sea moves in the water in these rises. You get them in the West, quite a lot. And we thought these pools, these big pools here, were a bit like that. The sea almost was coming in underneath. So we got very interested in this rocky outcrop down here, and how you might describe that, and what way that really worked.

And I suppose, we use the sketchbooks in a lot of different ways. It's not just things on the site but it's also things you might see in an art exhibition or in an exhibition of sculpture. Or you might be somewhere where you like the fireplace and you just take a note of it. And all of these things just kind of come back at you.



McCullough Mulvin *Cut 8*  
Interview *1m 25s*

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N: The inter-relationship of natural and man-made, or in-your-head geometries. I think it's the excitement of natural order - of rocks, how they position themselves, how you find them, how you respond to that, beyond making a box, or beyond making something silly that's just a blob or a form. What kind of way do you establish a tension between those two things? I think that's a lot of where those kind of things come out of. And I think there's other projects that are actually like that too.

I think there's a long story of sort of settling a building into a site like that, by constant over and back between the place - and the place can be an existing building, it really doesn't matter. There's interesting relationships between consideration of a site which is an existing building beside it, adjacent to it, - and with the natural landscape. And the way you think about it is the same. It's a gradual over and back, asking questions of the site and the place, back to the building. Relating geometries and thoughts and materials that the building is set in, or has some kind of relationship to the site.



McCullough Mulvin    *Cut 9*  
Interview                *32s*

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R: I think the process is sedimentary as well in terms of the way you think about it and the way that it comes up and the areas that you might be interested in, or want to experiment with, or think about. Or something will trigger it, like that drawing of the rock. It comes up then and becomes then part of what you're trying to make. It's always an experimentation ground I suppose, it's like a laboratory of ideas.

V: It's a test bed.



McCullough Mulvin *Cut 10*  
Interview *1m 40s*

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V: This is something I've been doing for the last few years is working with etching, because I really am very interested in line. Often you're just thinking what's in your head at the time that you're working on anything. And this is one that's based very much on the plan of this test facility. And what I was really stuck on, before this worked in a certain way, was how I was going to link the building and the landscape. And it's a bit like Alvar Aalto saying that you get a brief and then you learn that, and then you forget it all, and then you kind of think about the concept - what's the building going to be all about? Something totally different.

And so moving to a different medium in a way helps me to move beyond where you're stuck at something. So in a sense, this thing which is compositional and planometric - about overlays which work in terms of copper plates and etching them and using different coloured inks to try and bring up different things - have given me another springboard to go back to the site plan. To work out how we're going to link all this back out into the landscape again. Because we have a lot of spoil on the site - a post-brownfield site - and some of that spoil we're going to form into a kind of a boundary for us.

And thinking about these kind of sub-circular overlays and trying to think how we could get the layering of this working back out onto the site plan. That's very helpful to me sometimes.



McCullough Mulvin *Cut 11*  
Interview *1m 40s*

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# GRAFTON ARCHITECTS



Grafton Architects *Cut 1*  
Interview *22s*

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S: Now we do use sketchbooks, a lot. But we use more is sketchbooks of this scale. And we do these collectively. And we draw over them and we mess around.

Grafton Architects *Cut 2*  
Interview *11s*

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S: And they're the moments  
when a project comes to life.

Grafton Architects *Cut 3*  
Interview 37s

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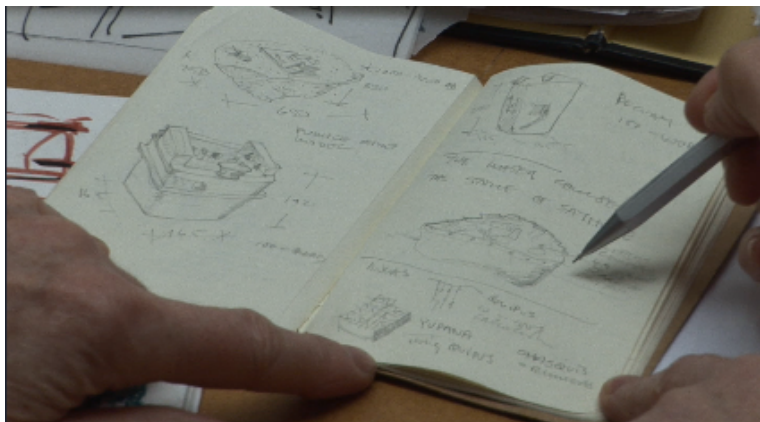
S: These are very valuable to us, especially when we come to try to what we call harvest the process. You know, the competition is done very fast and then you have to pull together the material. And somehow, we always try to keep these - we just staple them and put them in an A3, so that when it comes to presenting then, we know we have our rough work file. So our rough work file, I suppose, would be our 'secret laboratory'.



## Grafton Architects *Cut 4* Interview *3m 34s*

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Y: In the ancient civilisation of Peru, they invented this incredibly complex monetary system. And we thought they were little models of townscapes. But in fact they're areas - they didn't only go up by tens, but other systems, very very sophisticated, to various powers. And it's 1400 to 1500. They're incredible. I don't know what they're called. But they make these incredibly beautiful little clay models. I just had an absolute ball just drawing these little clay pieces.... <Yvonne goes on to describe the money counting trays....> It was an independent civilisation that happened because the conditions were perfect. So it was on its own; it wasn't influenced by other places. It began like Mesopotamia or China. So ancient Peru kind of began.



## Grafton Architects *Cut 5* Interview 57s

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Y: <Describing the Lima university>  
Educationally, the fact that you have all these rooms of say 50 students and they're all spilling out at the same time (this is very repeated in terms of the sandwich of requirements: laboratories and classrooms and offices and library) that we felt that we could have this trickle - this human trickle effect. Not just with water, but then that they'd meet each other.

And I think that's true in Bocconi; the professors are all up and the students are below, but they're aware of each other. And that's what's interesting about those kind of sketches too - that it's not just water, it's not just structure - that's why we go from the sketch to the 1:50 or 1:100, because it's people in the end are moving. It's people. That you make this thing in which people have their lives.



# Grafton Architects *Cut 6*

## Interview *3m 16s*

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S: Our laboratory is not that secret, and while we use sketchpads like these - they're also really important - the kind of collective pot of ideas that happens throughout the making of a project. It's interesting, when Yvonne showed me these sketches, which don't seem like much, if you don't mind me saying so Yvonne <laughter>, I just knew we could win the competition. Because it somehow summed up an idea of a big motorway, the low scale, high density housing becoming a kind of terrace. And then the fact that Lima is on a cliff overlooking the sea. We use geological terms to sometimes catapult us into another way of thinking about a project. And you were talking about making it like a cliff; you know, that it was like a cliff edge to the motorway - but that it has a soft side to the city.

And then we were talking about things like Corb's Algiers project or Neave Brown's housing project in London years ago, where you've got the noisy railway line and then you have the housing. And we're kind of backing up to a motorway. And these were the early sketches, because what we do I suppose - especially in a competition, probably - it's a slice through the way that we work. We'll go off with a brief and we come back and we barter, really, as to what is the best idea. But this sketch I think is really nice because it's about speed; it's not about a genteel street, it's about speed and it's about noise. And how you could make big things which could occupy.

Y: But it's also taking certain views of what the reality of a project might be. In the end, people will go past it; this isn't just working from an organisation or a plan; or trying to make the thing. This is in a city we didn't know; we had never been to South America; it was very fast and very new and then it also was a tight site. So there were kind of programmatic things: one is the ordinary things of a small site, large accommodation, six-thousand people - how do you make a hill town? And that's what the initial discussions were: making a university, but it's not just a university anywhere in the world, it's in this particular city. The discussion was really about, yes, the fastness, but also that it could be an inside outside. There's a lovely sketch which describes the Bocconi project, which was - Shelley asked the question, could we blur the boundaries between university and city? It's kind of questioning, you know, the lines between people, the lines between city. It has a social component as well.

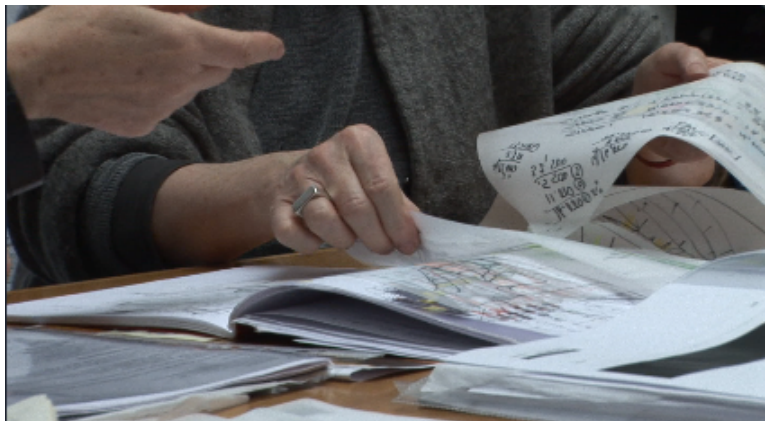


Grafton Architects *Cut 7*  
Interview *1m 12s*

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Y: But this was social, because the professors and students would mingle, but also the breezes, which were close to the sea, would actually perforate and punctuate and filter through the building. So it was kind of like trying to assess all the needs. I think that's what's interesting about these kind of drawings that we tend to do, because we're trying to find the concepts and we're also trying to find the symbolic component.

I think these kind of drawings can kind of tell a story. And we had this conversation about the unsayable, or that people don't know what they want until they see it. I've just come back from looking at a hundred-and-sixty images of the same project, where we were in the last four. And it's incredible to see the ideas that other people, when they interpret... So when clients give architects the possibility of things, it's how you then translate it. These are like the words or hieroglyphics or something.





Grafton Architects *Cut 8*  
Interview *34s*

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S: But also what's amazing when you work in a team is you can take a sheet like that and you can interpret it. You know because there's all kinds of other things in the office like infrastructure, landscape, architecture as infrastructure - and here we were talking about football stadiums, you know, that maybe it should be like a football stadium. Alexandra Road is a bit like a football stadium, if you look back at it with contemporary preoccupations, it is a piece of infrastructure and it is like a kind of arena.



Grafton Architects *Cut 9*  
Interview 45s

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Y: What we were saying was, we have a small site, we have a powerful motorway which is like the main connection to the city - fast, fast, fast city - and then you've got your gentle connections to something else. And then by pushing these apart; I mean, this drawing, what I find amazing is the shorthand. They look like scratches but they're not, they're everything embedded, that's what I find about them. When you do it with a coloured pencil, the coloured pencil then highlights what's priority in this particular thing. And you come in with sort of wadges - people hoarding great wadges of coloured pencils.



Grafton Architects *Cut 10*  
Interview *40s*

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S: I always feel my drawings are really tough and rough. <Pointing out Yvonne's drawing> I can't draw with that delicacy. And then Ger <Carty> has another way of drawing - a different kind of fluency. Before you've designed a project, at home after his dinner or something, he makes these drawings and comes in with them. And then we have to try and translate them into structure - you know, size and plans and organisation. So I suppose it describes the way we work - there's something very tenuous, which is the idea.



Grafton Architects *Cut 11*  
Interview 26s

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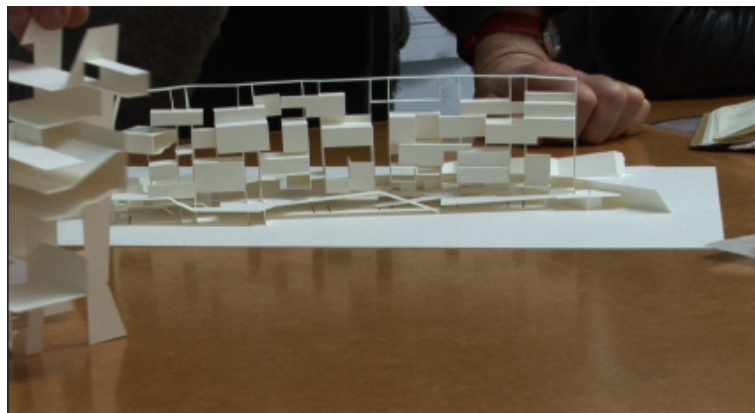
Y: We talk about those boulders that get thrown up by the sea. Boulders are rounded because they've been flung, pulled and dragged. I think in this studio that that is a characteristic. There are different talents, if you like, or different strengths. And things are interpreted. Something goes so far and then it stops and somebody else takes it and it rolls and it rolls. Sometimes an idea just *isn't enough*. It can be a great idea but it isn't enough. And it's not communicating; that's what I find.



Grafton Architects *Cut 12*  
Interview *42s*

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S: <Pointing to paper model> And I suppose this is like a sketch as well, because this was done before the scheme was drawn by Donal <O'Herlihy>. And you could say it's a three dimensional sketch. There's rough plans... <points to some more sketches>. Then we're trying to see, what's the geography of the building. Are those blocks blocks of rock set into this big kind of infrastructure? You know, there's those kind of things.



Grafton Architects *Cut 13*  
Interview *1m 20s*

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Y: Recently, I was dragged screaming to life drawing classes. And I brought charcoal that I'd left in a packet for I-don't-know-how-many years. And you realise that charcoal is both precise and muddy. And you get covered in it. And then you realise that it's fantastic for skin. And then Shelley produces these terrific <sketches>, you know, using charcoal. I think what's fantastic is that things feed in from one another - that charcoal is completely imprecise being precise. And it's perfect for that kind of scale of idea. That sometimes you can't... What I find with the pencil, the point of the pencil sometimes is too precise. Whereas what I find with these ones here, when you do that, it's about prising apart all the functions. And you don't choose that just by accident. The big piece of charcoal is a big, fat lump of a thing that makes you think in a different way, I think.



Grafton Architects *Cut 14*  
Interview *1m 54s*

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Y: Because this kind of project can only do certain things. And the client has sent us on the images from the competition. And what's amazing is watching how other people interpret the programme for three phases of a university. And a lot of them are, I think, very corporate and could be in Montreal or could be in other parts of the world. But what we were interested in was, how could we make it so that it felt like it was in a country where the blurring of inside/outside could be capitalised on. So this kind of thing is saying, "How do we make people enjoy each other's company, holding the thing apart..." I mean, I think this is a beautiful thing, in terms of interpretation.





## Grafton Architects *Cut 15* Interview *1m 52s*

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S: We were very lucky because Joanne had been to Lima. And she had made this fantastic elevation which is all foggy. And I was away somewhere and I came back and Yvonne and Joanne were telling me they were going to make a foggy elevation, and I thought they were mad - you know, that it just didn't make sense to make something foggy. But it's actually very nice, it's this thing of it disappearing into the sky. And when I went there, you know, you look one minute and the city is there, and you look another minute and the city is gone.

Y: And the fog comes down, so the relationship between ground and being in the sky, and merging with the atmosphere - it makes you think about life in a different way. What was wonderful about this <model>, when we went across the Atlantic Ocean with this and arriving to it, it's like some sort of gift, you know, some sacrifice. As Shelly says, this is a sketch model. But it actually describes the spatial possibility and the structural rhythm. So it also means that people who don't read drawings - not every member of a client body or users can read drawings - so being able to make a model that's beyond the stage you're at means that you can communicate a thing.

S: I also love the way you can look at completely different projects like a football stadium, even though you're doing a university - which Yvonne very cleverly calls an "arena of learning" - which was handy. But you know, that you can range from something like a stadium to a housing scheme to whatever that would feed your project.



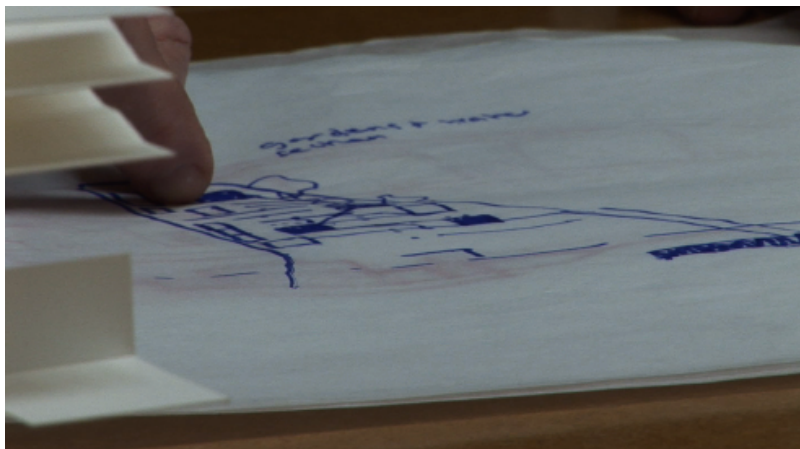
Grafton Architects *Cut 16*  
Interview *38s*

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S: And then just jumping to these kind of sketches to do with water.

Y: There's 9mm of water in Lima so it's on a desert. So water is precious.

S: But there are very nice studies about how we'd use water tanks to span between these guys. Where they're double fins that we could, under the staircases... That you could use the water tanks in the staircase zone to collect water, but then it also means that those fins are braced.



## Grafton Architects *Cut 17* Interview 47s

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Y: What was amazing in the museums there is that this stone of sey-oo-itay - I don't know how you pronounce it - it's carved and water is precious. We were doing it knowing what a place having 9mm of water... Now you know you need loos and rainwater and that - but it's not just a kind of fashion of sustainability. It was actually for us embedded in the project.

So then when you find it culturally - and I suppose what we would hope to achieve in projects is that we would try and find a cultural component, that's it not just *doing a project in another place*, but what do we learn from it - I mean, that's what these things, these sketches are trying to find. And what I find amazing is that they made models of reality.



# Grafton Architects *Cut 18*

## Interview *1m 52s*

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Y: There's a fabulous essay which was in the New York Review of Books, which is about the impact of the visual image in South America - even on legislation.

S: Was that 'The War of Images'?

Y: Yes, there was an exhibition on, I didn't see it, it was in Los Angeles. But the whole thing of images and - well, I suppose for us, structure, and social possibilities of six thousand people not just being in a lift shaft up and down and not seeing one another. It's the openness. I suppose when we talk about geography we're talking about cultural geography and climatic possibility and integrated so it's a bit of fun. And each project begins again.

You know, we've done other universities in other climates, but... Shelley was talking about Toulouse at a lecture the other day and what comes out really clearly is the carving out of the centre of that project to capitalise on their particular climate and their social idea of space.

We talk about the void. We often quote Alexander de la <?> saying that architects should make as much nothing as possible, and we're very interested in that. Because although some things are what you need - the classrooms, the laboratories - but Shelley put it very clearly, I remember, a number of years ago, we were doing a lot of schools for the Department of Education and they're very prescribed, the rooms. But you were talking about that, really, the architecture is in the jigsaw, the kind of cartilage between. That's what all these are - trying to understand the craft of the thing but then pushing it out... That's what's amazing about this one, I think this one is amazing.



## Grafton Architects *Cut 19*

### Interview *1m 10s*

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S: I think this does describe the way we work, because different offices work in different ways. It is collaborative. It is a mixing pot. And that's something that we really enjoy: you know, that different people bring different things literally to the table. And then you reconfigure the project to edit or absorb those ideas. When you have a good team it's a wonderful thing, it's a wonderful conversation.

Y: It's like a relay race. Somebody has one thing, somebody has another, but the sense of the group is really very strong. I looked at that exhibition [in Tullamore] and you realise that some boards with very good ideas just can't tell enough of a story. It can't come alive enough. It's like there's a carcass of a very strong creature, but it can't get up on its legs or something. There's something about all the various techniques of being able to bring it alive. There's something about the team - we work hard together.



# Grafton Architects *Cut 20*

## Interview *2m*

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S: When we're talking around the table, we hand the pencil around, because somebody says something, you say, 'Can you draw what you mean?' because you don't know what somebody means. I think we have to draw in sketches to communicate, otherwise we don't know what the other person's talking about, because words are very misleading, and people imagine different things - imagine things differently.

Y: I agree but I think there's another component, which is another kind of layer. If you think of filo pastry, there's these layers of kind of influence. Sometimes it's two sentences by a poet, or something you come across. We gave a lecture which was called 'In Dialogue with Gravity' - we found an amazing collection of words which represented for us the twenty-two metre cantilever in the Bocconi project, let's say. But then we weren't sure if it came from a Japanese dance company or a structural engineer or whatever. So we even blur the sources. There's a Russian saying: nobody lies like an eyewitness. We get sources and they become blanchmanged into something else.

So I think it is drawing, and it is sketching, but I also think it's people coming back with tales. Like Joanna coming back from Peru, describing Lima to us as an architect who had felt the fog, and had photographs of people enjoying each other's company outside. Which confirmed to us that when you've got temperature and a culture like that, that we could loosen up corridors and not make them inside. It's travellers from an antique land as well - I think there are stories, and you might see a good film, or you come back sometimes describing a good radio programme about a poet or something, and that's enough to sustain you for a week - because there's so much embedded wisdom or something in it.





## Grafton Architects *Cut 21* Interview 59s

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S: I mean, what's lovely is we sketch, but somebody can also make a fantastic image on the computer. We're not saying that it's only hand drawing.

Like, some of the images that people produce by abstracting an idea, or making a quick photomontage where you overlay one thing on another. You know, like being able to take an image and put it on the site at an early stage is an incredible facility to have.

I mean, sometimes, it tells you too much, and there's no mystery, and you don't particularly like that because you didn't think it was going to be like that - you thought it was going to be bigger or smaller or whatever - and you know that you've got to go *back* and reconfigure it.

But it's a wonderful - like, James in our office makes these amazing, really fast images. He finds photographs on Google and he puts Donal's model into a photograph, and we find that fantastic.





## Grafton Architects *Cut 22* Interview *1m 19s*

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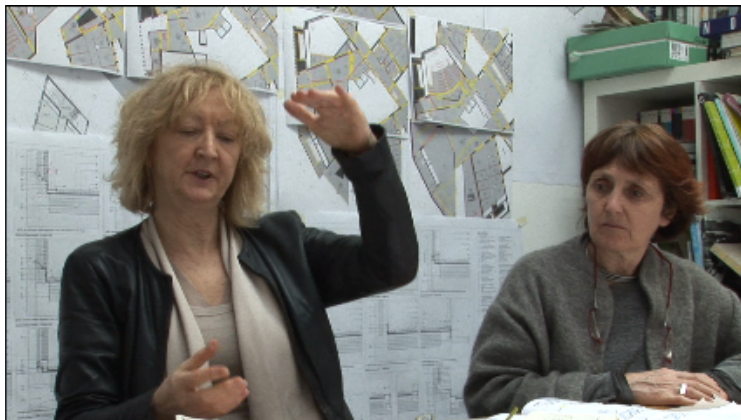
Y: We find the 1:50 and going up very quickly to the 1:50, that we go up to 1:50 very quickly because you can see people. So the sketch is kind of like the DNA, and then - what is that really like? So we go from tiny to big really quickly... And you know, we say "That's going to be horrible."

We're in practice over thirty years or something so you look at something and you say that'll work or it'll be horrible or something still looks horrible, or it looks even worse than before.

But we went up to 1:100 and stuck it up on the wall here. And we say, yeah, that could be an amazing stadium of education or...

Once the kind of stadium of education idea became... we could see people sitting on this terrace with their laptops and the wind howling through and students talking to one another.

But I think it's the going from sketch to 1:50. We kind of began that project at this scale, with a big paper model. Which we threw out because it looked so wicked. <Laughter> And now we're sorry!



# Grafton Architects *Cut 23*

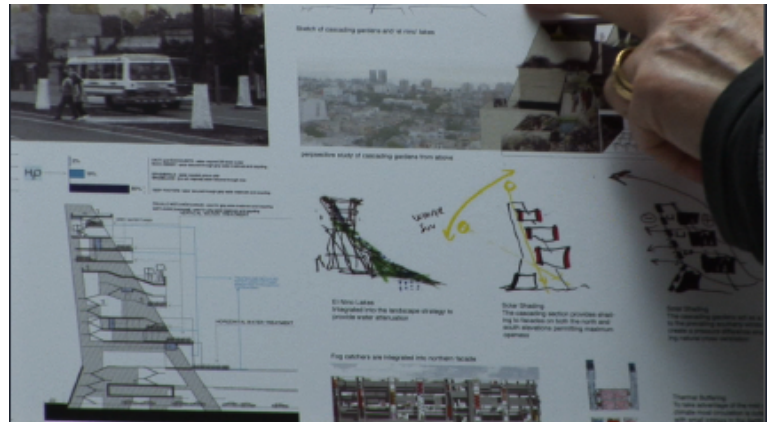
## Interview *1m 13s*

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S: What's also interesting is when you take atmosphere - how do you represent atmosphere? And I suppose that's when we use photographs. In Villa Nuevas, those undercroft spaces, you know, we had those on the desk beside us. Just trying to get that slightly misty, hot... You know, when the air isn't clear. The opposite to a sunny, frosty day here. It becomes slightly murky. And that's kind of important, that that gets woven in at an early stage.

I love this drawing as well, this was about flooding. Because every four years or so they have this thing called El Niño, which is heavy rain. It's not monsoon, but it's heavy rain - and Yvonne sent this sketch back actually. You scanned it and sent it back, didn't you? Because you were away and we were working - and how we could capture that, and salvage the water and make El Niño lakes or whatever.

Y: We were trying to make the car park. We thought if you could... if the whole back of the building could become cascading, all the walls where the cars were, for a certain time, would become lakes to hold them, was an idea. But El Niño doesn't happen that often, really, because of global warming.



## Grafton Architects *Cut 24* Interview *1m 16s*

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Y: But it was interesting then, because Joanne, who had been to the highest lake, Lake Titicaca, which is one of the highest lakes in South America I think. And that's also about terracing - you see the terracing of the... So we were making the roofs of the rooms below terraces. So we were scavenging to make water - because it's precious, it's like liquid gold - it was amazing...

Both Shelley and I, we were in China, we went to see the Forbidden City. And in the main palace, there are something like 300 little gargoyles and when it rains they spout. So especially in our climate, we don't capitalise on rain as a pleasure. We see rain as something that's uncomfortable. But... there's that beautiful St. Peter's Church at Klippan by Lewerentz, he's got this fantastic gargoyle that kind of spouts out.

So I suppose we wouldn't sketch enough. I was conscious today I wasn't sketching, I was taking photographs on my iPhone.



## Grafton Architects *Cut 25* Interview 47s

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Y: I found that very interesting: to observe myself. That because I wanted to show people, I was taking photographs. But if I was not doing that I would have done sketches.

So the iPhone has become a sketchpad. So what we do sometimes - like, in some of those, you sketch, you photograph and you email it back to the office. So the iPhone, I think, is an amazing invention. Because you can communicate and you can do the... So you can make an image of that scale become the thing.

S: But that describes a drawing - you know, when we got that sketch back, we knew what you were talking about. Whereas if you phoned us and said, "We should do something about El Niño", we'd have been like, "All very well, but what?" kind of thing.



MICHAEL DOHERTY

SHANE O' TOOLE

O ' DONNELL +  
TUOMEY



TOM dePAOR